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# On the Iron Ranges of Minnesota

REVISED EDITION

By

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## On the Iron Ranges of Minnesota

THE drama of modern American industry, with its attendant social, racial, religious and political developments, may be seen in vivid realization on the iron ranges of Minnesota. The crude ore of the mines and the crude European labor make the foundation for a splendid system of industry. Slowly and surely also there is being developed a people who will play an important part in the further development of American democracy. The immigrant is getting under the heavy load of American industry. He is not afraid of work, but there is in him the inherent desire for opportunity to work out his destiny.

There are two iron ranges in Minnesota, the Cuyuna and the Mesaba. "Mesaba" is the Chippewa Indian name for "giant" and like a great prostrate giant lies this mighty vein of rich red ore extending for a hundred miles through the rough, hilly country. Only a few years ago the Chippewa brave, unaware of the fabulous treasure beneath his feet, hunted through these forest-clad hills, and in turn was followed by the lumberman who stripped them of their wealth in pine. Then the prospector came and his "findings" have brought an industrial population of 100,000 souls, eighty-five per cent. of whom are immigrants, with two-thirds of the male population unnaturalized aliens.

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This population is gathered about the mines. They are often permitted to erect their houses or shacks, on the company's land. The unmarried men crowd these shacks to the doors. Night and day shift men



IRON FOR THE SHOVELING

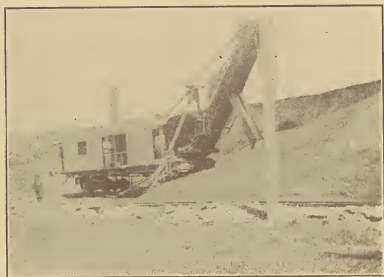
alternate in occupying the bunks. Bread and meat and beer is the standard meal. When a home is established with wife and children, conditions are generally much improved, but are far from sanitary,

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and at best the home is desolate enough. On the other hand, many of the miners are housed in fairly good cottages erected by the companies. In the larger communities the Slav or Finn or Italian often invests his hard earned savings in a really creditable home and takes an active part in the neighborhood life.



UNCOVERING ORE

There are many influences, both good and bad, at work molding this immigrant population. Often the saloon-keeper is banker, ticket-agent and "friend" to the immigrants. Then there are organizations

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which are constant trouble-makers, inciting to strikes and general lawlessness.

For amusements the miners meet in the dance pavilions, the lodges and the moving picture shows. An accordion and a dozen people dancing in a ten by twelve room is a common sight.



IRON MINE IN NORTHERN MINNESOTA

The mining companies have erected several club-houses, equipped for recreation, sports and studies pertaining to mining.

The public libraries provide literature, not only in English but in the native languages. Doubtless

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the public school is the greatest single agency in the development of true American citizenship. Taxes provide a large income, and no school buildings have finer equipment and none are better manned. Many of the high schools are equipped for technical train-



EMBRYONIC CITIZENS

ing and include in their curriculum junior college and university work.

The church is also present on the ranges, but as yet it has taken no very great hold on the people.

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There are about fifty Protestant and twelve Catholic churches on the Mesaba range. The foreign-speaking Protestant churches are of the strictly conventional type. From an institutional standpoint it may be said that there is not a single church on the range with anything like an adequate equipment. The people do not seem to care for the conventional type of church. Many of them have fled the old world to escape political and ecclesiastical tyranny. They have lost faith in the church as they know it. "Religion," says one of our missionaries, "is a foreigner on sufferance on the range. A fireman in one of the engine rooms told my son he did not see why I came, as they did not want any minister here. The people are case-hardened. At a funeral or in time of suffering a sympathetic pastor can often get a hearing. Last week I buried a home guard whose father was a skeptic. There were 225 in the congregation and they were very attentive. At the close of the service the father thanked me sincerely for the comfort the sermon gave him."

In the little city of 2,000 people where this Congregational church is located there is only three and one-half per cent. of the population in Protestant churches, and this proportion would probably hold good generally on the range.

The great hope of reaching these people with the gospel is through their children. One of the mis-



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sionaries had gathered a group of boys ranging in age from ten to twelve years and was showing them some Sunday School picture cards illustrating the life of Jesus. These boys seemed to be very much interested. To them Jesus was a new character. Soon the missionary came to a picture of the crucifixion. "Wot's that?" said one bright-eyed boy. "That's where they crucified Him," said the missionary. "Wot's that?" said the boy. "They nailed Him to a cross," was the missionary's reply. "Did it kill 'im?" the boy eagerly asked. "Yes, it killed Him," was the reply. Then this little fellow drew a long breath as he said, "And that was the last of 'im." Then of course the missionary improved the opportunity to tell the wonderful story to boys who had never heard it before.

This is not an isolated case. There are many, many of these boys and girls who have never been to Sunday School in all their lives. The missionaries are making progress in reaching them. One school of 113 members is reported in which eleven different races are represented.

But how can the fathers and mothers be reached, with all their prejudices against the church and religion? Trained foreign-speaking workers, house-to-house visitation, the sympathetic word, the kindly deed, the little neighborhood prayer meeting, the distribution of the Bible and religious literature in the

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mother tongue, the little mission church and preaching service—all these are like seed sown in diverse soils. Some will bring forth rich harvests.

To Christianize and Americanize the polyglot and "polycustomed" people of the ranges is a difficult but tremendously important task. The coming democracy, of which they are more and more realizing they are a part, must be built, not upon lawless revolution but upon evolution, both natural and permanent. The hope of this new democracy is bound up in the democratizing and fraternalizing gospel of Christ. The need and ministry of the church are therefore apparent.





**The Congregational Home Missionary Society**

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